

3 Movements (Feminism, LGBT Rights, Marriage Equality), 2 Diaries, 1 Trans Woman's Message

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For more Princess's Spirit Ideas

There are more fiction and non-fiction titles by TaraElla relating to the Princess's Spirit concept.

TaraElla also maintains a blog and (upcoming) show inspired by the Princess's Spirit, called The TaraElla Show.

Visit **www.taraella.com** to find out more.

Disclaimer

While effort has been made to describe accurately the historical events referenced in the book, the accuracy of such events described cannot be guaranteed.

Opening Words

I could have written a manifesto of inclusive feminism, but I know that some of you would still be unconvinced.

So instead here is a story, inspired by real life stories I have known. I am sure many of you will be convinced of the need for a more inclusive feminism after reading this.

Stay strong and keep the dream alive,

TaraElla.

Diary One

Chapter 1: 2003 Entries

April 2003

Introduction

Dear diary,

This is the first entry, so I'll introduce myself.

My name is Natalie. Or this is what I call myself, because others call me a different name. You see, they perceive me as a boy, even though I'm really a girl. I'll have to resolve this later. But for now, this is how it is.

I have just turned 16.

I like music, getting to know different cultures,
collecting things, and computers. And I'm
developing an increasing interest in politics too.

I hope that over the coming months and years,
you will come to know me better.

Love,

Natalie.

May 2003

Does School Have To Be Like This?

I hate putting on my school uniform. Why? It marks me out as 'male'. But the rules say I have to wear it anyway.

Why do schools have to be so mean, to make rules that make people unhappy? Well, you may say that they don't make these rules for trans people. That's definitely true, trans people are so rare that schools and rule makers are generally unaware of our existence. I mean, my school isn't 'bad' anyway, they have made an effort to make gay students feel included, for example, which is better than what many other schools are like. You can't expect them to know about trans students, right?

But why does the school have to have a male and female uniform? Out there, in the real world, many clothes are unisex nowadays. But schools are like, stuck in the 19th century, where all clothes are either male or female.

Let's ask another question. Why can't trans students go to school as their real gender? This would work well, right? But there would certainly be an uproar from other parents. There have indeed been a few cases around the world where trans students have attempted to go to school as their real gender, but it hasn't always worked out well apparently. Which explains why there have only been very few cases of this happening. This also only happens in some very open-minded, 'progressive' areas, and I'm sure where I live doesn't count as one. Furthermore, all of the handful of cases I know of are in places where students don't have to wear a uniform. I guess this makes it easier too.

Which brings me back to the uniform, and rules in general. Rules are bad for minorities. Rules are inflexible, and minorities who aren't well catered for get caught up in them. Which is why society shouldn't have that many rigid rules, in my opinion.

June 2003

Gay Marriage, Milestone One

So gay marriages have arrived in the English-speaking world. The Supreme Court in Ontario, Canada declared that gay marriages should be legal, and the Canadian Prime Minister decided that he would accept the ruling. Ontario has since started issuing marriage licences, even though gay marriages have not been legalised in federal law yet. Prime Minister Chretien says his government will do this next, but the conservative opposition wants to ban gay marriages instead, so it can go either way now. But even if the future is uncertain, many Canadian gay couples have already applied to get married, and even several couples here in Australia plan to travel there to get married. It appears that they will take any opportunity available.

Public opinion is generally not on the side of gay marriage. There's been an increase in support since the 1990s when the issue was first debated, but supporters are still in the minority even in most Western countries.

Several months ago I had a long and deep thought about this matter, and I decided that I should support gay marriage. I mean, gay people aren't going to change or go away, so why deny them something that they want? Last month I talked about how rigid rules were making minority people's lives hard, and here's another good example of this. If gay marriage is legal, most men will still marry women and most women will still marry men, and life will still go on. But for about 2% of the population, it will mean everything to them. Why is this so hard to understand, for the majority of people?

At least, this is the first milestone for gay marriage in the English-speaking world. While the issue has been debated on-and-off for some time as some kind of far-fetched idea, it is finally 'getting real'. We don't know where this will lead, but I'm happy that at least the conversation has started properly.

October 2003

Developing An Image

One important task for all women is to develop a sense of dress. A dress style that suits your body type and presents your personality. While genetic girls have many years to develop this, trans girls don't. I haven't even come out to my family yet, but I see this as an important part of my preparation for the future.

In truth, it's all trial and error. I can't count how many times I've bought something that doesn't really suit me, and wasted what little money that I've got. On the internet there are older trans women with websites regularly showing off new outfits that they have bought, but as a teenager I don't have nearly as big a budget. Not that I would want to look like them either - they look like they are going to a fashion show every day, but I just want to look 'normal'. But

it's really a challenge to 'explore' your sense of style on such a limited budget either way.

Trans girls also lack the benefit of sharing opinions about dress styles with other girls, as they grow up. However, the internet trans community is of great help in filling this void nowadays. We can upload and share our photos, and encourage each other in our comments. I'm not confident enough to share my style with the world yet, but hopefully soon I will be confident enough to start engaging in this process.

Chapter 2: 2004 Entries

April 2004

Trans Girls Not Welcome?

Lately I have been very into reality TV. American Idol is my favourite, but there are many others. I like watching people chase their dreams, stepping up to new challenges week after week, trying to do their best. In fact, their spirit has become great inspiration to many people around the world. For most shows, there are also internet forums, where fans can gather to discuss the show, and of course, cheer on their favourites. Quite a few on there have also said that their favourites have inspired them to try out next year.

So what about me? Do I want to try out? It's complicated. In an ideal world, I would. But I

wouldn't want to go 'as a boy'. It's not the real me, and I don't want people cheering on someone that's not the real me. Can I go 'as a girl'? Maybe. After all, drag queen Courtney Act was on last year's Australian Idol. But then, she didn't get into the top 12. Besides, drag queens are often seen as just a bit of entertainment, actual trans girls may be seen quite differently. So it's probably not worth it.

Feminists complain about the glass ceiling limiting women's advancement. But then, trans girls don't get even the opportunities average people enjoy. How can this not be a bigger problem?

June 2004

It Can Go Either Way Now

One year ago, gay marriage arrived in the English-speaking world, in Ontario, Canada. Since then, court rulings in Massachusetts have made it the first US state to have gay marriage, and similar rulings have also been handed down in several other Canadian provinces. Gay marriage is shaping up to be a hot topic this year.

But there also appears to be a danger in this. Forces opposed to reform are now mobilising, especially for the US Presidential elections later this year. They plan to set up referenda in many states across the US to prohibit similar court rulings in the future. With public opinion still firmly against gay marriage, they expect to win. President Bush may even support a nationwide gay marriage ban, it's currently unclear whether

he may pursue this. Meanwhile, Democratic candidate John Kerry has said that he does not support gay marriage either, but appears to be open to civil unions, i.e. arrangements like marriage but not called marriage. Still much better than what we've got now.

July 2004

The Religious Right in Politics

There is increasing interest in the rise of the so-called religious right in politics, in the light of their efforts to place gay marriage bans on the ballot in multiple US states in November this year.

I read a few articles discussing this, and I also did a bit of research. And it has got me worried. Real worried. Apparently, the religious right has a vast network of resources, and have been busily spreading fear about gay marriage and encouraging opponents to enrol to vote for November. It appears that the Republican Party likes this too, as these 'new voters' are very likely to go their way. It is at least partially for electoral advantage too that they are considering a federal ban on gay marriage. Meanwhile, even though John Kerry has ruled

out supporting gay marriage, even his sympathy to civil unions is not acceptable to this crowd. Apparently, they believe gay couples should have exactly no rights before the law.

The religious right campaign may have already had some effect on the presidential race. Earlier this year, Kerry was clearly in front, but now it appears that Bush is the favourite. Which I don't like to see, not only because of the gay rights issue, but also because I believe Bush should be punished for last year's War in Iraq.

Meanwhile, I also worry that the religious right agenda is not just about being anti gay marriage. I also found that sections of the religious right, being Christian fundamentalists, are very hostile to those of other religions. Since 2001, in the wake of 9/11, there's already been a worrying problem of rising Islamophobia and its associated encouragement of

xenophobia and hawkish foreign policy. We really don't need the religious right to encourage this further. We want world peace, not religious wars.

August 2004

Australia Bans Gay Marriage Too

Whatever happens in the US politically is sure to affect events in Australia. This week, Prime Minister John Howard successfully imported the idea of introducing bans on gay marriage to prevent courts from ordering its recognition. A few cases before the Family Court involving gay couples married overseas asking for recognition have given Howard the perfect opportunity.

As in the US, electoral politics is a strong part of the consideration, notwithstanding Howard's own conservatism on gay rights. The opposition Labor party had been dragging its feet on this issue for a few months now, but now that an election is coming up in several weeks' time, they too fear electoral backlash if they didn't allow Howard to get his way. So they waved this unjust piece of legislation through,

although quite a few Labor politicians abstained from the vote.

It should be noted that while I have personally been a passionate supporter of gay marriage for nearly two years now, it's actually still not a major topic even among gay activists here.

Why? The main reason lies in the existence of de-facto couple rights in Australia, at least on the state level. In Australia, couples who live together for a period of time have most of the rights of marriage. At state level, these rights have been extended to gay couples in recent years. At federal level, the Howard government remains resistant to this idea, but if the Labor party wins office, it is expected that they will take it up. So the main reason for needing gay marriage in the US, i.e. that everything from hospital visitation rights to the joint filing of taxes necessarily depends on it, does not exist here.

And if the legal rights of marriage can be obtained otherwise, a substantial segment of the gay community just wouldn't want to fight for marriage rights. And it's not just because they would rather have one less fight. Many gay people remain sceptical, even oppositional, to the idea of marriage, saying that it is assimilationist. I really don't understand this, to be frank. Gay people don't form a race of their own, like black people or Asian people, because they aren't necessarily born and raised in gay families. Hence there's no issue of 'assimilationism' vs 'multiculturalism', of retaining or losing one's heritage culture. The fact that they aren't accepted fully by mainstream society is another matter. But wouldn't gay marriage just address this?

Anyway, now that the battle lines have been drawn, I'm sure Australian gay activists will be

more interested in the marriage issue. Already there have been protests around Howard's actions. I'm sure the interest won't die down. Howard may have given us a gift, ironically.

November 2004

The Worst Result

It was never likely to end happily, but this year's US elections were horrible. Anti gay marriage referenda passed in every state they were on the ballot, meaning that the introduction of gay marriage by courts or state legislatures is now prohibited in more than 30 states. The Republicans' strategy to court the religious vote also triumphed: not only has President Bush been returned, but they now control both houses of Congress. Analysts are already wondering if the Democratic party has any chance at all of getting back into government in the short to medium term. With the Republican party benefiting so much from the religious right, this bloc is expected to have an increased say in future government policies.

Post-election analysis have paid particular attention to the religious vote, or 'values voters'. Which is probably just a nicer way to say voters who were stridently opposed to gay marriage, given that this was the only 'values' issue being widely debated this year. There are now suggestions that the Democrats should engage with these voters, and perhaps somewhat alter their platform to suit these voters. This makes me very worried indeed. While the immediate results of this election was bad enough, if a 'bipartisan consensus' forms around a need to bow down to the demands of the religious right, a lot of needed reform will be blocked for a generation or more.

Perhaps it was only a 'messaging' problem, other people have suggested. For example, the religious right has painted gay marriage and its supporters as anti-family, and their platform as pro-family-values. But what's so anti-family

about encouraging gay couples to get committed and 'settle down'? These election results have also prompted the rise of a 'religious left', who criticise the religious right for failing to address the economic needs of many struggling families. How is this consistent with family values? The truth is that the religious right agenda is not 'the family values agenda', and its opponents are not anti-family either. We need to get this message out, before it's too late.

Perhaps what we have got is a wake-up call. We really need to fight for our values. We really need to engage with the public and explain and argue for what we believe in. Otherwise, our opponents will gain the upper hand, by default.

Chapter 3: 2005 Entries

January 2005

Coming Out As A Supporter

I have just realised that there has been a silver lining to last year's gay marriage setbacks: that most people who know me, including my parents, now know my support for the reform. My parents still don't support it, but they have not tried to change me either. Best of all, I didn't need to specifically discuss this issue. I just made it one of the reasons I didn't like Bush and Howard, whenever I was discussing politics in the past few months.

If only coming out as trans was as easy.

February 2005

A Missed Opportunity

So tomorrow I start university. It represents the first 'reasonable' opportunity in which I can be my real self. While openly trans students in high school are extremely rare, I know of plenty of people who are openly trans (or even trans but in 'stealth mode') in universities around the world. Unlike in high school, many universities have anti-discrimination policies, and there isn't going to be an uproar from other parents in any case.

I would have loved to start as my real self, but I know it's really not happening now. I had all summer to work up the courage to come out, but I still didn't. I really fear how my parents would react. You never know. But I guess it wouldn't be entirely smooth, to say the least. Starting at a new school is stressful enough, and

part of me really thinks I don't need this extra stress. So the whole summer was spent wrestling between action and inaction. And inaction won out.

Because I didn't come out to my parents, going to university as my real self would pose several problems. The biggest one is that several people on campus are my parents' friends, and word of me presenting as 'someone else' will quickly get back to them. It will even spread among their friends, causing them much embarrassment. This is really NOT a good way to come out.

So tomorrow could have really been the start of a new life. But let's face it - it won't be.

April 2005

Only in the Netherlands?

I'm still struggling with coming out: what (to say), when, how. One of the biggest problems is that people have been used to who I appeared as, even though that's not entirely the real me. I mean, the personality is real, but I would rather present as a different gender. Would people understand?

Wouldn't it have been simpler if I could have 'always' lived authentically? Or, as close to that as possible, like coming out very early on? I mean, I've known since age 3 anyway, so I've already lost nearly 15 years. Which is almost inevitable for trans people. I mean, none of us get to come out and live authentically before a certain age anyway. There are some things trans people always miss out on, and the first

decade and a half or so of gender appropriate experiences is one of them.

Unless you were born in the Netherlands, and recently. There have been recent reports from that country that some transgender kids have been allowed to live authentically from a very young age. If only we all had the same opportunity! But the Netherlands is a special country. It was the first to legalise gay marriage, for example. (It's been four years and the sky hasn't fallen in.)

June 2005

Gay Marriage in Canada

It appears that the government of Canada has finally been able to legalise gay marriage nationwide, after a very tight vote in parliament. Along with the Netherlands and Belgium, three countries now have gay marriage. However, it may still be premature to celebrate as yet, as opponents of gay marriage have said they will continue to fight it. It still cannot be ruled out that a future conservative government may repeal gay marriage altogether.

Still, people are already celebrating. With victories so hard won and hard to come by in recent times, any victory, 'solid' or not, deserves to be celebrated. Even if the future is uncertain, it is certainly wise to make the most of every opportunity available.

As expected, not everyone is celebrating. My friends in Canada have told me that there has been homophobic graffiti in their city recently. But that's just to be expected. With every progress comes resistance.

Meanwhile, I understand that the UK is considering the introduction of Civil Partnerships, also often called 'civil unions' in other jurisdictions. This type of scheme would allow almost all the rights of marriage to be granted to gay couples, but without access to the 'title' of marriage. Still unfair, but still better than what's available right now. And of course, much less controversial and 'easier' for politicians to support and enact.

September 2005

Sick of Missing Out

I will say this: trans people often feel like we're only living half a life.

I've missed out on more than 18 years of gender appropriate experiences already, and every day I'm missing out on more. It won't change until I work up the courage to come out and present as my real self. I still don't know when I will be confident enough to overcome the barriers involved.

But I'm indeed sick of missing out. I've missed out on gender appropriate experiences all my life. Like being treated like a girl. Dresses. Certain toys. Not having to play sport with the boys. Going out as a group of girls to see our favourite pop bands.

And the list is still growing. Recent additions include graduating high school as a girl, proudly having her graduation photo taken. Also, starting university as a confident young woman.

These things are taken for granted by almost every one. But when you have to watch others experience them while you continue to live a lie, it really hurts.

I'm really scared I won't have the courage to do anything about it, and life will just pass me by as I grow old, the list of missed experiences getting longer and longer every year.

October 2005

Is Feminism Relevant Anymore?

Today, I read an article discussing if feminism is relevant to our times anymore. The author made the point that most young women don't actively identify as feminists nowadays, because they do not feel its relevance to them. They feel that the main goals of feminism, like voting rights, equal pay for the same work and anti-discrimination laws have all been achieved even before they were born. They just don't feel that feminism has anything to offer them.

I think that if young women today don't embrace feminism, it's not their fault. Rather, it may be the fault of feminism itself. If feminism claims to be a movement that is about empowering women, it certainly isn't living up to its ideal, from the point of view of today's young women. Maybe it's because feminism

isn't listening. What I mean is, it hasn't been inclusive and adaptive enough to meet the needs of modern young women.

Speaking as somebody who identifies as female, feminism has also failed me. While they claim to be against the 'patriarchy', many feminists are even more transphobic than the patriarchy itself. Moreover, the 'rights' that the feminist movement are all about sometimes feel like another layer of exclusion to me. The anti-discrimination that they support is clearly for 'women born women' only, and some feminists have even opposed anti-discrimination laws for trans people. The affirmative action they support is again for 'women born women' only, and every time I apply for something and know that I will be considered as a 'man' for the purposes of affirmative action, it increases my gender dysphoria ten-fold. Most feminists don't even care about the likes of myself.

The point is, if feminism has ceased to be relevant, it's because older feminists haven't actually listened to what young women really want, and haven't been inclusive enough.

Chapter 4: 2006 Entries

January 2006

Working Up The Courage

I'm working up the courage to come out. To my parents at least, because otherwise it would be impossible to go 'full time' at university. I am determined to start this year authentically.

But it's really not easy. Firstly, there's the uncertainty of what will happen. It is not even unheard of for parents to disown their trans children, even though I don't believe this is likely in my case. Still, invalidation and some form of rejection is likely, and it's not going to be a nice feeling.

Secondly, since trans awareness is so low, my parents may mistakenly think that I am mentally ill, and drag me to some psychiatrist. Which is not a bad outcome in and of itself, both because they would be able to explain to my parents what transgender (or gender dysphoria, the technical term) is, and because trans people have to go through a psychiatrist to get treatment anyway. Having my parents pay for some of these sessions would be great. However, having my parents fear that I may be mentally ill will create a very stressful situation at home.

Finally, there's also the issue of what to say, exactly. The idea of transgender doesn't come up in everyday conversations, you see. I have to think of a way to bring it up, without making it sound like a joke, and without causing misunderstanding. It's much harder than it sounds. It's almost like trying to tell someone you're actually an alien all along.

February 2006

I Hope I Can Make This Work

I came out to my parents three weeks ago. Coming out was rough, as expected. It turned out that my parents hadn't even heard of trans people before, except for one controversial case before the Family Court of a trans teen seeking treatment two years ago. They did drag me to a psychiatrist, who did convince them I didn't go mad. So that part is now resolved.

So here's the deal I got. I am free to do whatever at university, but can't walk out of their house 'in a dress'. So I can dress in a unisex manner, perhaps with some makeup, when leaving home, but I would have to change once I get to my campus. And I would have to change again before I come home.

It's not ideal, but I think I can make it work. At least it's a chance to start a new life.

I can't say my parents are accepting at this stage, but there's going to be plenty of time to work on that.

April 2006

So Far, So Good

It's been five weeks of 'new me' at university.
And it's been surprisingly 'smooth'.

All my friends have accepted the 'new me'. A few were surprised, but they were OK with it. Unlike my parents, they did understand what being trans was. Perhaps the younger generation has had more exposure to stories of trans people.

I was advised by some to visit the LGBT centre on campus, to see if I could get support there. Not surprisingly, even the staff there hadn't seen a trans person before. (That's how rare we are!) I was a curiosity even there. Nor were they able to provide any support, beyond some words of comfort. Therefore, I didn't go back.

Since then, life has simply gone on.

I am gradually 'transitioning' my dress style. I still dress unisex, feminine unisex is how I would describe it. I will gradually present more femininely. It's more comfortable for everyone this way.

My assessment: so far, so good.

June 2006

It Still Feels Surreal

It's been several months since I came out to everyone. And it still feels surreal.

It still feels surreal that I've let the world know my 'lifelong secret'.

I mean, to be trans in and of itself has always carried with it a surreal feeling. Being trans, I have always been aware that I have a 'condition' that almost nobody on Earth understands, and that is shared by less than 1/1000 people (or even less than 1/10000 people by some estimates).

Having to talk about it again and again, having to explain it again and again in the past few months only made it even more surreal.

I'm now preparing to dress more femininely. The first thing to do was of course to 'test drive' my new dress style. So I travelled across town for the sole purpose of walking around in a shopping mall in a dress, to see if I get any stares or strange looks. Luckily I got none. But the whole experience felt surreal, almost as if I was playing Second Life, but with me being physically in the computer walking around the virtual landscapes. Maybe it was because I was actually a bit nervous. It's not as if it was my first time wearing a dress, but still it was my first time doing so in public.

Overall, life still feels normal. But every now and then, there has been an extra surreal quality to it, especially when dealing with

transition related stuff. Sort of just like the idea of being trans is surreal to most people.

August 2006

The Paper Trail

One of the hassles of gender transition is the need to change your documents. And even though I am only 20, and I don't have bank loans, mortgages, insurance policies, or even a car, there are actually many documents to be changed. To make things more difficult, each document is handled by a different organisation or government department, each with different rules on what other documents you need to bring, and what forms you need to fill out. (In contrast, most people only change their name due to marriage, and a marriage certificate would generally suffice for that.) To make things even more difficult, some departments are only open on certain days, and some are located at inconvenient locations I've never been before.

The key to success here is to have good organisation. Firstly, you need to decide which ones to change first. Doing them in a certain order can make everything more convenient. Secondly, each document to be changed needs to be treated like a project on its own, ideally with its own folder. For every such 'project', there are forms to fill and supporting documents to keep track of. Finally, you need to arrange for times to visit the departments, some of which require bookings. I guess in this regard I'm luckier because I'm still a student.

And then there's the nervousness, and the surreal quality of it all. Throughout the process, I kept wondering what the man or woman reading my application was thinking. Did they see me as weird? Have they handled other trans cases before? (Probably not.) Are they surprised to receive my case? (Probably yes.) Everyone I've come across have been very professional, though.

It's no wonder that some trans people just keep putting off the whole process for years, or only do some of it. Besides actually costing some money, it is also both intellectually and emotionally demanding, especially if you want to get it right in one go. I guess it would be particularly difficult for those in a depressed mood.

Shouldn't it be easier?

October 2006

The Internet Trans Community

The internet has been a gift for trans people. In fact, before there was an internet, there probably wasn't a trans community per se. There were trans support groups and organisations in some large cities, but they could hardly be called a 'community'. Trans individuals are so rare that it would be difficult for them to form a community in any physical location, except maybe San Francisco.

The internet has been the first place many trans people, myself included, first learned about the options for transitioning. It was also the first place in which many trans people, myself included, came out to the wider world. It also appears that the trans community has an especially high proportion of computer geeks. This perhaps explains why the trans community

has very effectively utilised the internet since its early days.

Through the internet, we learn about the existence of other trans people, so that we feel less lonely. We are also able to share 'passing tips', comment on each other's photos, and sort of go through things like coming out at school or work and the endless document changes together. These are all trans-specific experiences that many trans people would have to go through alone if not for the internet.

As previously discussed, gender transition has felt surreal in multiple aspects for me. Knowing that other people are also going through similar things has made it less surreal, though. Even if they may live on the other side of the world.

Chapter 5: 2007 Entries

January 2007

The Pronoun Fear

For trans people, to 'pass' simply means to be taken as a member of the gender you present as. I would like to think that I 'pass' most days, but there are still days when I don't. Or more accurately maybe, people to whom which I don't.

Which brings me to the pronoun fear. To be referred to by the wrong pronouns is an invalidation of our identity. And, for me, it also feels like 'punishment' for not passing. Each time someone refers to me by the wrong pronoun, it feels like being punched in the stomach. It's probably something only trans people can understand.

If only we lived in a world where people simply understood and accepted trans people, where there wouldn't be a need to 'pass', and where people will always use pronouns accordingly. If only.

But then trans people are so rare, it would probably be impossible (and unreasonable) to ask the world to change the way it runs for us.

February 2007

New Year at University

Tomorrow marks the beginning of my third year at university.

Last year was sort of overshadowed by trans issues, but hopefully this year I will be just another student again. Things like coming out to people, having to explain yourself again and again. Things like changing your paperwork, going through the so-called paperwork trail, having to explain yourself all the way. Hopefully now that it's over, life can be a bit more, well, 'normal' again.

Normally, I would be the last person to want to be 'average' in anything, but when it comes to being overtly trans vs blending in, I prefer to be 'more average', like most trans people. If the

world didn't see us as either freaks or curiosities then maybe we would have a different attitude. But then, we don't live in that world.

Being trans shouldn't dominate my life for more than a short period of time, and hopefully it won't.

March 2007

Not That Much Has Changed

A favourite topic of discussion among the internet trans community is 'how is life different now that you're perceived as a different gender'.

To be honest, not that much has changed. I love the way I look and I love my clothes, but I don't see much of a change in my life. Certainly, you would expect that people who know already me wouldn't treat me differently. But I am a university student and I meet new people every day. I can say with confidence that I have not noticed any substantial change in the way strangers or newly introduced people treat me.

There have been a few subtle changes, like other women complimenting me on my clothes

and accessories, and that's very nice. I feel that men are more likely to hold doors open for me, but this is not a consistent thing, nor did this consistently not happen last year. I like the subtle changes, but I have to say they are subtle.

Maybe more changes will come. Maybe not. We'll see.

May 2007

Trans and Feminism

The relationship between transwomen and feminism is, complicated.

Feminists are currently divided on how they perceive us. There are those who think that only 'women born women' (as if we aren't) should be included, and there are those who believe that transwomen should be included too. Those who want to exclude us have traditionally been the majority view in feminism, but some younger generation feminists are now arguing for change in their movement. Still, it appears that those who want to exclude us continue to have the upper hand.

On the other hand, many transwomen actually want to be feminists. It is as if they see being a feminist, and acceptance by other feminists, as the ultimate validation of their identity as a woman. Transwomen who are feminists often call themselves transfeminists. In fact, there are websites dedicated to the idea of transfeminism. Transfeminists regularly join with other trans-friendly feminists to argue for trans inclusion, against old-school feminists, using the internet as their battleground.

I see it this way: I have no interest in joining a club that doesn't want me there anyway. I do appreciate that quite a few younger feminists want to welcome us into their movement, but it is clear that many feminists, maybe the majority, are still hostile to us. I feel that, in the feminist club, I would have to battle even harder to have my identity recognised than in the outside world. So, no thanks.

By the way, it's not as if you have to be in the feminist club to be a real woman. Just two years ago, I read a newspaper article questioning if feminism is still relevant. Many young women our age actually don't want to identify as feminists. Some feel that the term is associated with a 'boys vs girls' attitude, and others think that the big feminist fights are over in the West anyway. So not belonging to the feminist club doesn't make you less of a woman. In fact, it may mean that you are simply with the majority of young women nowadays.

August 2007

Maybe That's The Way It Should Be

A few months ago I recorded whatever (few) changes I saw in my life as a result of being perceived as a different gender. At the time I was semi-expecting to see more changes as time went on.

But I have to say, no, my life is still mostly the same as before. I love not being referred to by a male name and male pronouns, but apparently I'm still the same person. As I'm still the same person with the same personality, the way I interact with people and the way people treat me have remained very similar to before. What else should I expect?

And in this day and age, it's not like that men and women are treated very differently

anyway. We don't live in the 1950s anymore, and I'm thankful for that. So what was I thinking, expecting that people would somehow treat me 'very differently'?

I guess the idea of being treated 'very differently' as a result of gender transition comes from the observation that masculine men and feminine women are certainly treated in different ways by their peers, mainly as a result of the different ways they interact with the world. But trans people don't go from very masculine men to very feminine women. I didn't put up a masculine act two years ago, and I don't put up an ultra feminine act now. I wouldn't have interacted with the world like the very masculine man back then, and don't interact with the world like the very feminine woman today. Whatever gender I am perceived as, I always interact with the world as myself, in my own style. Consequently, it shouldn't be

surprising that I am received in a similar manner.

Many internet trans women love to say things like they lost 'male privilege'. I don't know if it's a genuine reflection or just another attempt to look 'feminist'. Even before transition I did not notice much 'male privilege' in everyday life, but back then, as I had not experienced living as a girl my opinion probably wasn't as valid. But recent experience has, if anything, confirmed my previous view. Certainly, there may be an element of 'male privilege' if you want to be a CEO or a politician, but to experience 'male privilege' or 'female disprivilege' everywhere in everyday life is a bit of a stretch of imagination in my opinion.

One of the surprisingly important things I have learnt through gender transition is that gender is only one 'property' of a person, and not the

most important one by far. It doesn't undermine the importance of my transition though, as I had to do it to get the gender 'distraction' out of the way. (It DOES undermine the argument that marriage must be between a man and a woman, and I feel glad that I can now use my personal experience to argue for same-sex marriage.)

November 2007

Getting Back Into Politics

The upcoming Australian election has gotten me back to paying attention to news and politics.

Long serving Prime Minister John Howard is up against Labor opponent Kevin Rudd this time, and polls are indicating that Rudd will win. Which is good news because it means Australia will likely pull out of the Iraq war finally.

There's recently been some controversy around Rudd's refusal to support same-sex marriage. As I understand it, Labor's platform will provide for equal rights for gay couples through both extending the nation-wide de-facto (cohabitation) relationship recognition system to all couples, and the recognition of civil union

or registered partnership systems to be set up by state governments. In other words, gay couples will have equal rights finally, but not 'marriage' itself.

It's really not surprising, given that this appears to be the most common approach among 'progressive' side major parties in the Western world at the moment. Two years ago the UK Labor government set up a civil partnership scheme for gay couples, but maintained that marriage would not change. The New Zealand Labor government also made similar moves. It's really about electoral politics, I guess. Polls have indicated 38% support for same-sex marriage in both Australia and the UK just a few years ago, and you wouldn't expect majority support at this point. We just need to take what we can, and aim to win the battle over the long run. Progress comes in steps.

The other thing that can potentially hold back same-sex marriage is the lack of enthusiasm for it among some gay activists. Both in Australia and the UK, some gay and lesbian commentators have even said that they prefer civil partnerships because they did not like the idea of 'marriage', presumably because of their own feminist or radical beliefs. Just last year some local gay groups and leaders refused to support pushing for the reform, citing other priorities. I think this attitude is unhelpful. Since some gay couples want to get married and denying them this right is discrimination based on sexual orientation, gay activist groups are indeed obliged to fight for this right, whether the leaders themselves like the idea of marriage or not! Wake up!

Chapter 6: 2008 Entries

March 2008

Life is Similar But Different

So it's been one year since my entry about how life is actually quite similar, even when you are perceived as a different gender. And one year on, it's still like that.

I've come to view it this way. Transition doesn't make you a different person. Rather, it makes you a better version of yourself, one unhindered by discomfort on the gender front. It takes away that burden, and lets the person beneath shine.

Life is still similar, of course. I have similar interests, similar attitudes, a similar outlook on

life, even similar political views. But life is different too, because I'm more confident in my interactions, and more naturally at home 'in my own skin', so to say. It's something taken for granted by most people, but it's something I have only had since recently.

The biggest difference is that, I can finally feel confident enough to move into the future knowing that I've left that 'something wrong' behind. All my life until two years ago I had wondered when I would be able to fix this 'problem', and when I would have the courage to do so. I had wondered what would happen when I 'came out', and what effect it would have on both myself and the people around me. It feels good to not have to think about those things anymore.

April 2008

Hope and Change

The US Democrats appear to be getting closer to having Barack Obama as their presidential candidate this year. If elected, he will be the first black president. Two of his most popular slogans are 'hope' and 'change'.

His stated attitude to same-sex marriage appears to be similar to that of Kevin Rudd: gay couples should be able to have equal rights under another name, but not 'marriage'. I guess electorally same-sex marriage is still too controversial to embrace. 'Gay marriage bans' have passed in more states in 2006 and some more are under consideration this year, and I guess it also can't help that the Canadian government which legalised it was voted out less than a year later.

But still, it's clear that his attitude to 'family values' does include gay couples. Which is a great start, because opposition to same-sex marriage is based mostly on a version of 'family values' that exclude gay couples. Like Rudd, Obama has based his opposition to same-sex marriage on just the way things have traditionally been. But I guess this is ultimately a circular argument, and wouldn't hold out for long if the homophobic version of 'family values' is defeated.

There's no inherent reason why 'family values' should be anti-gay. LGBT people are part of many families too, and an increasing number of parents are fighting for the rights of their LGBT children. A version of 'family values' that exclude these families would be no 'family values' at all.

It's time that 'family values' start including LGBT people. I also believe that when we get this new consensus same-sex marriage will become widely supported.

June 2008

I'm Done With Transition. Or Am I?

I guess I can say that I'm done with gender transition. It's not much of an issue for me anymore, in everyday life. I just live my life, without needing to think too much about gender nowadays. On most days, anyway.

But then some people say that a trans person is never really done with transition. There are always some 'trans' aspects of your life that may pop up. Like some document that you forgot to change, or some medical consultation where you have to discuss your medical history. Or even just old friends from high school or earlier who reappear in your life after many years. It may be awkward, but I know I'll have to be prepared for these possibilities.

The difficult thing with being trans is that, whenever something trans-specific comes up, we feel like we have to explain ourselves, to people who may not understand, or even worse, may be transphobic. I guess the same applies to gay people too. But at least people generally know what being gay entails. This comes from the fact that most people know at least several gay people in their lives. Since only one in a few thousand people are trans and many aren't even out, it is unlikely for most people to personally know a trans person. Therefore, it is not uncommon for people to either have no understanding of trans issues at all, or even have misunderstandings. It's almost like being gay in the 1950s, in this sense.

But then, the need to 'explain myself' doesn't really come up often. So most days I'll just be a normal young woman. In this sense, transition is done. I could live with that.

Diary Two

Chapter 7: 2012 Entries

December 2012

Inspired to Restart My Diary

I used to have another diary, where I talked about my gender transition and LGBT politics, particularly same-sex marriage, which by the way is called marriage equality now. I left that diary behind when I felt like I had nothing more to say, mainly because I was done with transition. But recent political and cultural events have made me re-read my old diary. I feel like the world is on the verge of major change, and many of the hopes, dreams and even daydreams I had about a better world may be coming true.

Here is where we are, after the big year of 2012:

Marriage equality is now legal in more than ten countries. Furthermore, the conservative governments of the UK and New Zealand, as well as the newly elected left-wing government of France, are likely to legalise it soon. US President Barack Obama's endorsement of marriage equality a few months ago has provided a further boost to our cause, despite the fact that marriage is decided state-by-state in the US. Just last month, marriage equality passed 52-48 by referendum in the states of Washington and Maryland, the first time a majority vote actually approved of marriage equality anywhere in the world. It means that anti-equality conservatives can't simply point to marriage equality's previous 100% referendum-losing record and say that reform is being forced on unwilling silent majorities anymore.

Hollywood and the entertainment industry have become major backers of marriage equality in recent years. Many celebrities have openly supported the cause. You would think that dance pop singers, who generally have large gay fanbases, would support equality if only for the sake of their own careers. But even several country singers have come out in support of the cause, risking backlash from their conservative fanbases. Meanwhile, gay and lesbian characters and couples have become more and more common in storylines on both the small screen and the big screen.

Here in Australia, we have an atheist, left-wing Prime Minister who remains opposed to marriage equality, quite a unique situation. Actually, the governing Labor party itself has a strong majority in support of marriage equality, as proven by a vote at their national conference last year and a parliamentary vote in September this year. But still, with the

conservative opposition binding their MPs to vote no (justified on the grounds that the party did not support or discuss marriage equality at all in the previous election), the vote itself was lost 98-42. The media reported it as an 'overwhelming' defeat, but I would say this is sensationalism, especially since Labor was the only major party granting a conscience vote, and there was majority Labor support. As for why Prime Minister Julia Gillard remains opposed, some including myself think that her 'traditional' (i.e. 1970s or 80s) feminist beliefs are probably to blame. You see, until recently many feminists have hated the idea of marriage in and of itself.

Trans issues are starting to gain awareness too. In April this year, Jenna Talackova became the first trans contestant of a mainstream beauty pageant, Miss Universe Canada. Controversy over her admission, which was ultimately resolved in her favour, have hit news headlines

around the world, and most people's comments were surprisingly supportive. I have also noticed that the language used in media reports about trans people have become more polite, and the use of offensive, sensationalist terms like 'sex change' or 'sex swap' have certainly gone down. There is now hope for a better conversation. Also this year, hit TV series Glee (often called the 'gayest show on Earth' for its many gay characters and storylines) have started featuring a trans character. Does all this signal that trans people are about to hit the mainstream?

Chapter 8: 2013 Entries

January 2013

What's in a Name?

As I said in my last entry, same-sex marriage is now called 'marriage equality' by most supporters and activists. The name most favoured by opponents remains 'gay marriage', which confusingly is still a name sometimes used by supporters.

There are two justifications for using 'marriage equality'. Firstly, it highlights that gay couples do not want an additional right, and are merely asking for equal treatment under the law. Secondly, it is inclusive of trans and intersex people, who may not be in a same-sex relationship but would still require legal reform to be able to marry. I think these two issues are

very valid, and therefore have adopted the new term myself.

I am concerned that some activists have indeed become very 'politically correct' here though, almost as if 'same-sex marriage' and 'gay marriage' are now homophobic terms. Guess what? They are not. I remember that former Canadian Prime Minister Paul Martin indeed called it 'same-sex marriage' when he presided over the reform in 2005, and UK Prime Minister David Cameron called it 'gay marriage' in his now famous speech about supporting marriage equality and his conservative values. If these are terms that our supporters use too, they should not be derided, even if they are not the best terms. Political correctness turns people off, remember.

So here is what I'll do: I will use the term 'marriage equality' myself, but defend the right

of people to use 'same-sex marriage' and 'gay marriage' if they feel like it.

February 2013

Marriage Equality Tops The Charts

Rapper Macklemore's marriage equality song Same Love has now been at the top of the official Australian music charts for a while. Originally written for the marriage equality referendum in Washington state last year, so far it has failed to make a big impact on most countries' music scene. But somehow enough Australians bought it to make it number one. Now there is also an Australian cover of the song, with the lyrics changed to reflect the local political situation, including some criticism for Prime Minister Julia Gillard.

Maybe people in Australia are more frustrated over this issue than in other countries. For example, there's not much to be frustrated about in the UK by comparison. Last month the Cameron government's marriage equality bill

passed the House of Commons, and it now goes to the House of Lords where it is likely to be approved to become law. While Australian parliament voted more than 2:1 against equality, British parliament voted 2:1 for equality. In Australia both the Prime Minister and the opposition leader remain opposed, while in the UK both the Prime Minister and opposition leader are supportive. This is despite polls showing similar levels of support for the reform in both countries.

Maybe, just maybe, people are buying the song so that our politicians will listen.

April 2013

The Conservative Case for Marriage Equality

New Zealand has become the second English-speaking country where marriage equality is passed under a conservative government. In fact, because unlike the UK the legislation does not need to go before the upper house for confirmation, we should probably say it's the first. The fact that this contrasts with Australia's left-wing Prime Minister Julia Gillard's refusal to support the reform has also not gone unnoticed in Australian media. It just shows that even conservatives may support marriage equality, while 'progressives' are not guaranteed to do so.

Ever since UK Prime Minister David Cameron's speech last year, where he said he supported marriage equality because he was a conservative who believed in marriage, there

has been an increased interest in the so-called conservative case for marriage equality worldwide. It's actually nothing new. I remember reading articles about this idea written by some US Republicans, going as far back as 2009. At that time, it was treated as just a curiosity. But Cameron's stance has propelled this idea into the mainstream.

I remember saying that a new approach to LGBT rights and marriage equality, where they are seen as an extension of 'family values' rather than something radical and challenging to existing society, will help the reform gain widespread support. It appears that my prediction has come true.

Meanwhile, Australia's conservative opposition party still refuses to grant their MPs a conscience vote, which actually represents the biggest roadblock to reform here. (Despite

Gillard's personal objection, most of the Labor party already support equality.) Local marriage equality activists have recently sought to bring about discussion of the conservative case for marriage equality here, in an attempt to increase conservative support and solve this impasse. I think this is a brilliant idea. Reform can only be achieved when we bring as many people together as possible, ideally from across the political spectrum. As activists often like to say, no one party can achieve marriage equality alone.

However, even the beginnings of this new phase of the marriage equality campaign has drawn fire from more radical activists. They claim that this focus will leave the more radical elements of the LGBT community behind. Guess what? Marriage is not meant for those who want radical relationships anyway, gay or straight. Those who believe in radical relationships have left marriage behind already,

in this sense. Marriage equality is mainly a reform that is important to those gay couples who want to get married, and to achieve it soon. Such couples cherish marriage, in the same way as Cameron and other conservatives do. Therefore, the conservative case for marriage equality is actually the voice of a substantial number, perhaps even the majority, of those marriage equality will affect most. I believe that radicals are in effect oppressing gay couples who believe in marriage if they disallow this voice to be heard.

June 2013

Getting Back Into Trans World

Since the time that I felt my gender transition was essentially complete, about five years ago, I had gradually lost contact with most 'transition friends' and haven't paid much attention to the 'trans world'. It's actually quite a common thing for trans people. Only relatively few stay in the community and become long term activists.

But I may be re-entering trans world in the near future, for the sake of a friend. You see, one of my transition time friends, Maria, who almost came out to her family and started transition but never did, is planning to attempt transition again soon. Back in 2006, we promised each other that we would be there for each other's transition and the difficulties involved, no matter what. However, she was never quite able to get her transition started, for multiple

reasons. She was there for my transition though, and I really have to help her through it this time.

It is actually not uncommon for trans people to require multiple attempts at starting or finishing transition. The whole process is complex and ridden with stress everywhere. This was especially the case back in the 1990s and 2000s, with even fewer support services than today. Combine this with the difficult things that can happen to people's lives, sometimes it just becomes too much to handle. Sometimes, there's simply no choice, but to turn back, and try again later.

August 2013

More Important Things

In terms of marriage equality, next month's Australian election provides a clear choice: the recently returned Kevin Rudd, who has also become the first Prime Minister to support marriage equality, or Tony Abbott, who does not support the reform. Unfortunately, the polls indicate that Abbott is in front.

Prior to returning to the Labor leadership in June, Rudd announced his support for marriage equality. Just like Obama, he switched sides and became a supporter. This election, he has pledged to introduce legislation for the reform in the first 100 days of the new parliament, if he is re-elected. On the other hand, not only does Abbott not support the reform personally, his party will not say what it will do regarding the issue in the next three years.

I have been out encouraging people, especially those who have expressed support for marriage equality, to vote for Rudd. Some have said they will do so. However, there are also plenty of others who have said that there are 'more important things to deal with first', implying a vote for Abbott. So you think gay couples who want to get married are not important, and can wait three or more years, right? I wonder how one can call themselves a supporter of marriage equality if they have this attitude. Just vote for Labor once and we'll get it done, and you are welcome to vote conservative again in 2016. Is even that too much to ask?

Polls may indicate that 60% or more Australians support marriage equality. But clearly they are not serious enough about it.

September 2013

Fear of Momentum Loss

So that's it. Abbott won, despite our best efforts to prevent it.

Even more depressingly, some supporters of marriage equality are about to give up, it seems. Several have suggested that we regroup in 2015 to fight the next election. I don't know how many actually hold that attitude. I fear that if this is a common feeling, we may effectively lose many active 'fighters', and lose a lot of momentum in the process. All political reform requires momentum, and if momentum is blunted, it may not return for a long time.

The fact that Abbott opposes marriage equality doesn't mean anyone should give up. After all, we had Gillard, who also opposed marriage

equality, until June this year. But we had momentum, and while Gillard didn't change her mind, many others were persuaded, including Rudd, who almost made equality law. In fact, during the Gillard era, Australia was clearly a major 'hot spot' for marriage equality discussion, second only to the US at times. Maybe many fought hard because they thought she could change her mind, because she was progressive at heart. Maybe the idea of Abbott, a staunch conservative on many issues, changing his mind is too alien for some to contemplate.

But that is stupid. Politics is driven by much more than what the Prime Minister believes. People can and should demand politicians reconsider issues in light of popular support. Even if we can't change Abbott's mind, we can gain supporters from the conservative side of politics, especially since now that they're in government they would have to listen more.

Furthermore, who knows if Abbott is still Prime Minister later this term? In fact, Abbott's main rival in his own party, communications minister Malcolm Turnbull, is a strong supporter of marriage equality.

As polls have shown, the majority of this country supports marriage equality. Our job is to turn them into passionate supporters, who will pressure the government on reform. It's time to step up our campaign, not to give up. We have built up great momentum. To give it all up just because Abbott won would be something to regret.

October 2013

Gillard's Explanation

So former Prime Minister Julia Gillard has finally given a proper explanation as to why she does not support marriage equality. As many people suspected, it is indeed related to her 1980s style feminist views. She simply does not believe in marriage. The fact that she had never married any of her partners should have given everyone a strong hint.

Many marriage equality supporters remain disappointed in her stance. They maintain that one can choose not to participate in marriage but still offer the choice to others. But then, from my understanding, many 1980s feminists feel like they have a responsibility not to encourage marriage in any way. Furthermore, as Gillard herself suggested, historically many gay and lesbian people actually held the same

view on marriage as herself. In fact, since Gillard offered her explanation, plenty of older generation gays and lesbians have indeed 'come out' to 'cheer her on'.

Some overseas people apparently believe that all 'progressives' and all non-religious people must support marriage equality. This belief is especially common in countries like the US, where almost all opposition to marriage equality comes from the religious right. But in Gillard we have a good example of someone who opposes marriage equality on 'progressive' grounds, just like in (British PM) Cameron we have a good example of someone who supports marriage equality on conservative grounds. It just shows that marriage equality is ultimately not owned by 'progressives' alone.

November 2013

Feminism vs Marriage Equality

This is a discussion on the fact that some feminists are actively opposed to marriage equality.

Don't get me wrong. Most feminists today actively support marriage equality, in the name of advancing equality to the LGBT population.

But some don't, because they think marriage is a bad thing, so bad that nobody should have it. As a personal stance, I believe that's fine. But then, a substantial number of such feminists actually actively oppose the extension of marriage rights, almost in the same way as the religious right. For example, if they were a politician in parliament they would vote against marriage equality bills, and if there was a

referendum held they would vote no too. Some even go out of the way to make a mockery of gay couples who sincerely want to get married.

You know, feminism should be about upholding the equal rights and dignity of all people, with a particular focus on women and others denied their equality by the patriarchy. Going by that spirit, wouldn't that require supporting marriage equality, if only as equality? What you, a particular feminist, think about marriage itself is a non-issue here. The issue is that there are many gay couples out there who want to get married, and the patriarchal religious right is denying them that right. In other words, the issue is not what you, a particular feminist, think is a good choice to make, but what some LGBT people want and are currently denied.

If the feminist movement is serious about 'fighting patriarchy', it needs to be serious

about LGBT rights and equality. And if it really is serious about LGBT rights and equality, it needs to support what many LGBT people want, rather than imposing its view upon them. It's time that old-school feminists really opened up their minds and start listening.

December 2013

One Nation, One Law?

In the absence of action on marriage equality by the federal government, the government of the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) legislated for marriage equality several weeks ago. As expected, the federal government challenged this law and had it struck down by the High Court, due to the fact that the federal government has overriding jurisdiction on the issue of marriage, as stated in the Australian constitution. 31 couples were married under the invalid law, which means that their marriages have also effectively been declared invalid.

This news has since spread around the world, and has received attention even from people in the US. One US commentator praised the US system, where marriage laws are decided on a

state-by-state basis. As of currently, more than a dozen US states (including two of the biggest ones, New York and California) already have marriage equality, with New Mexico being the latest to join the list. The flexibility of the US system has allowed marriage equality to be won in some jurisdictions, even if it remains out of reach in the majority. In contrast, in Australia it is an all-or-none situation.

The US system also has another advantage, in that more states may decide to adopt marriage equality once they see the economic and social benefits it brings to a neighbouring state. I guess this was perhaps one of the reasons for the ACT government's law. Unfortunately, in Australia, we are not provided with this ability.

Chapter 9: 2014 Entries

January 2014

Bringing Families Along

Maria just came out to her family, and to her relief, it went relatively smoothly. Unlike in my case, her parents understood what she was talking about, and were generally accepting. There was no confusion as to whether she was 'going mad'.

I guess coming out at 27 is easier than doing so at 18. But probably more importantly, coming out in 2014 is definitely easier than coming out in 2006. Trans awareness is higher nowadays, thanks to a gradual increase in media reports discussing trans issues. Unlike back then, it is now quite common to encounter stories about

or involving trans people in the mainstream media.

The many media reports discussing trans people and their family going along the journey of transition together have also been helpful. Resources like these simply weren't widely available back in 2006. They show that supporting a trans person and going through the journey together can be a process that strengthens ties through mutual support, a very poignant application of family values. They also show that trans people are not the anti-family-values rebels transphobic commentators portray us to be, we too are people who love our families. Maria showed her parents two videos and several magazine articles relating to trans people situated in the context of their family, and it helped the coming out process.

The world is indeed changing, and for the better. It is waking up to the fact that LGBT people are just people who happen to be a bit different in a certain way, but are still normal people situated in normal families, who just want a better life for themselves and their families.

February 2014

Growing Out Hair

As part of her transition, Maria is growing out her hair, and it's currently stuck at the length where it's very irritable.

So hair became part of our conversation today. The vast majority of trans women grow out their hair during transition. Which is probably not a surprise, as short hair is considered masculine in our society, and long hair is considered feminine. Maria, however, made the observation that many trans men didn't cut their hair for transition, as many have had short hair to begin with. The conversation then turned to why trans women don't often already have long hair to begin with, despite this being their preference.

The truth is that, when it comes to presentation, 'women' (or who society perceives to be a woman) have more freedom. Just think about it. The 'male' equivalent of a tomboy would be considered socially unacceptable in a wide variety of settings. The 'male' equivalent of butch women? I don't think I've seen one. 'Males' are practically still in the mid 20th century or so compared with women, when it comes to socially acceptable dress.

And why is this the case? Historically, both men and women were subject to oppressive gender norms in presentation, as in other areas of life. However, the feminist movement changed all that, for women. As for people who were male, the feminist movement didn't care for them much, at least not until the third wave. But even today, this glaring inequality is just accepted as normal, even by a lot of young feminists. Shouldn't a movement dedicated to

gender equality and liberation think harder, and try harder for change?

Of course, there's another very important reason why feminists should be concerned with this inequality. As women can dress butch and be respectable but men can't dress femme and be respectable, this de-facto means that masculinity is to be preferred and femininity is to be shunned. Any numerical 'equality' that feminism can win on such a playing field will be just numerical, where women can have equality, but only if we behave more like men.

March 2014

Excuses

Marriage equality has officially begun in England and Wales. Scotland is set to follow suit later this year. Nearly 20 US states are also on board now. Australia? Who knows when?

So I have been out and about, both on social media and in the real world, drumming up support and momentum for marriage equality, doing whatever one individual can about the issue. The marriage equality activists in this country are unfortunately not playing it right at the moment, in my opinion. Unlike in the US, where they are riding on the wave of momentum, here the latest action seems to be a campaign telling the whole country that 'We're Waiting'. That's really not good enough.

But what's worse are the excuses I have encountered from other activists or potential activists. They say that there are more important issues. Like homelessness - except how is that an LGBT-specific issue? Or like the inadequacy of LGBT representation in mainstream media - except how is that as important as marriage equality to the actual lives of people? I suspect that these people really do not want to fight for marriage equality at all. It's really not that surprising, when you think about it: many of the 'more radical' LGBT activists have long resisted having anything to do with marriage equality, and in recent years many have given the 'other priorities' excuse. I thought that progress on this front internationally would have changed their attitudes somewhat. But perhaps I was wrong.

This may be controversial, but let me say it: I actually think that the 'more radical' activists are dodging reality, and indulging in fantasy.

Fighting a real political fight is tough and draining work. But it has to be done, if only for the benefit of future generations. On the other hand, one can choose escapism: like saying how 'marriage is unimportant, and so I don't care about marriage equality'. Withdrawing from the civil rights battle of our time maybe an easy choice, but it's definitely an irresponsible one to make, in my strong opinion.

May 2014

The Social Justice Warrior Problem

Like many people undergoing transition, Maria has built a network of trans friends going through transition, mostly at a similar phase to herself. As I've personally experienced, it is very helpful to go through the process with other people.

However, Maria is also worried that her new friends is pressuring her to take particular political stances, and join in certain political activities, all in the name of social justice. Like myself, Maria also thinks that social justice is a good thing, but she is sceptical of her new friends' politics.

I have come to the conclusion that Maria's new friends are in fact 'social justice warriors'

(SJWs). SJWs essentially believe that all social inequalities need to be eradicated as soon as possible, and can resort to extreme, illiberal means sometimes. For example, SJWs have called for businessmen who have funded anti-marriage-equality campaigns and scientists who have made sexist comments to be sacked, and many support an increase in speech restrictions on university campuses in the name of protecting minorities. The internet and especially social media have become their favourite platform for organising and 'collective action', often in the form of sharing or retweeting similar messages together, creating a 'critical mass' that demands to be noticed.

SJWs are kind to trans people. In fact, that would be an understatement. Since they are all about protecting the welfare and equality of underprivileged people, they are very protective towards trans people. They take their opposition to transphobic behaviour and

transphobic speech extremely seriously, perhaps more than even we transpeople ourselves. It is unsurprising that a substantial number of trans people have been attracted to their ranks.

But trans-friendly as they are, Maria and I both remain sceptical of their ways. Our first criticism of them is about freedom. Oppressed minorities only found their voice and got heard due to freedom of speech in the first place, something that SJWs clearly don't cherish enough. The first people to help such oppressed minorities also often had to act against social expectations using their freedom of conscience, another thing SJWs clearly don't cherish enough. Our second criticism of them is that we fear their ways may alienate people, paradoxically entrenching racist, homophobic and transphobic attitudes. For example, in high school I had a friend who was opposed to marriage equality because he thought that it

was part of the cultural elites' way of forcing the rest of us to embrace a radical agenda. Years later he became convinced of the need for marriage equality and the importance it held for many people's lives, and today he is almost as dedicated to the cause as myself. I think that if SJWs were around in the early 2000s, their behaviour would essentially have confirmed his earlier views, and he may never have changed his mind. Our final criticism of SJWs is that they essentially aim to increase the number of rules which society has to observe. I have always had a strong view that rules often unintentionally disadvantage minorities, something that my own lived experience as a trans person has taught me.

SJWs may mean the best for us and for the world, but we really can't say that we accept their agenda in good conscience.

June 2014

Re Affirmative Action

The recent renewed interest in feminism in the Western world has reignited interest in affirmative action. There has been a new found zeal to set up affirmative action quotas where none has existed before, and to increase quotas to 50% where affirmative action already applies. (Quotas like 33% or 40% were more commonly used in the past.)

Here's a truth I haven't dared to speak up about yet: I feel quite uncomfortable about all this. Before my transition, affirmative action quotas, which never included trans people back then, were a major source of gender dysphoria for me. Nowadays, some (but not yet all) affirmative action programs include all 'non cis-men', which I think is a great improvement. But still, what about those trans women who are

still too scared to come out? I feel like supporting affirmative action means that I will be complicit in increasing their dysphoria.

Furthermore, over the years where feminists haven't been the best friends of gender non-conforming people, we trans women have instead formed alliances with other LGB and gender non-conforming people. Over the years, we have fought side-by-side for acceptance and rights. Now, should I support affirmative action programs that will leave behind those 'cis-men', who are gender non-conforming, who are often also gay, and therefore actually suffer at the hands of patriarchy, often even more so than us? I really don't feel comfortable doing so. It would feel like betraying your best friend.

I haven't spoken up because I fear that I would be seen as a traitor to the sisterhood if I did. But here's how I feel. Unfortunately, many

feminists are still quite judgemental of those
who don't think the same way as they do.
Meanwhile, real people are suffering.

August 2014

Just Blame Abbott

Recently, someone in an online discussion asked the question of why the momentum for marriage equality in Australia seems to have slowed in the past six months. The answer most people gave? Tony Abbott.

Excuse me, but I'm not aware that Tony Abbott has banned discussion on marriage equality, or that he even has the power to. It's true that the Prime Minister is not a supporter, but that's just the same as under Julia Gillard, except that we actually now have a supportive opposition leader. So how is Abbott responsible for the lack of discussion on the issue?

If Abbott is not responsible, then who is? Those who should be discussing it but are not doing

their part, of course. Every social change relies on those who believe in it to champion for it, to say the obvious. If those who claim to be supporters start dropping the ball, a rapid fall in momentum will be inevitable. For the record, I've done my part, but too many supporters have simply dropped the ball ever since Abbott came to power.

Too many so-called activists in this country would like to have their prize handed to them by the government on a silver platter, rather than going out there and putting in years of hard work to fight for it. I'm not joking here - there's been plenty who have said we should wait for Abbott to get voted out and pile the pressure on the next Labor government to deliver. They want to go about it in what they see as the 'route of least resistance'. But that's not how good activism works. You want to know why Australia is lagging behind the US on marriage equality? Let's look back to a decade

ago. Australia had Howard, the US had Bush, both were strongly opposed to marriage equality. The difference was that US activists worked hard, while Australian activists avoided the issue, mostly content to settle for the limited rights the governments had granted us. Apparently, local activists have not learnt that lesson, and are intent on wasting the 'Abbott years' as well.

I know from my personal life the importance of putting in the hard work to persuade people to change, whether you feel you are close to victory or not. Bit by bit, I brought my own family on board in my gender transition. It took years before they became accepting, but over time they did. Change is something to be created day by day, month by month, and year by year, whether it is on a personal or a political level. If you seek to wait for the 'right moment' to act, that moment will never come.

September 2014

A New Landscape for Trans Youth

Maria was talking to me yesterday, about how she hoped she could have transitioned earlier. I simply told her that it would be unwise to make a mess of one's life if the circumstances are not ready yet, and her decision to stall transition back in 2007 was the right one. Surprisingly, she told me that it wasn't even just 2007 she was talking about. She had come across several recent articles about the lives of trans teenagers nowadays, and she regrets not transitioning at their age. She went on to list the things that she 'wouldn't have had to miss out'. I had to remind her to be rational, to remember what the world was really like back when we were in high school, and how a successful transition there was very unlikely.

(Some) trans youth really have it much better nowadays. I'm not saying that there's no discrimination or bullying, because I know that would be false. (Maybe in another generations' time.) But at least they can come out (as long as their family is not super conservative), schools are often accepting, they can live authentically, and they can receive proper treatment from dedicated medical professionals. They probably still don't have an entirely 'normal' life, but at least they don't have to 'miss out on everything watching life go by' like we did.

None of us had this opportunity. But then, the world moves forward step by step, and we should be glad that the next generation gets a better deal than we did, rather than regret upon the limitations of our own lives.

Trans youth today also know that they have more opportunities than ever in life. Granted,

discrimination still exists. But when trans women are even allowed to enter Miss Universe and its associated competitions (and at least two have already done so), you feel like the sky's the limit, and don't feel like you need to compromise on your dreams that much. On a more everyday, 'realistic' level, news reports of trans people making it as professionals of all kinds, models, actors, sportspeople, even YouTube stars are becoming increasingly common. The very low 'trans ceiling' that I felt back when I was a teen has certainly been lifted much higher.

The world owes it to trans youth to not limit their life potential via discrimination and disapproval. I'm glad we're moving in the right direction.

October 2014

My Missed Out Years

The recent talk with Maria about the opportunities for trans youth nowadays and what we had to miss out in contrast has brought me to reflect again on what I 'actually missed out on'.

I've come to the conclusion that, as time passed, the number of things I missed out on has diminished greatly. For example, I found out that it was never too late to make friends as 'one of the girls', and that it really wasn't as different from my previous friendships as one may expect. I may not have been able to attend formal (prom) as a girl, but I have attended many similar events as a girl while at university, more than enough to make up for it. And I was able to shop for outfits with my mother and my girlfriends for these events, just like I would

have done for prom. I may not have graduated high school as a girl, but I certainly graduated university as a confident young woman.

The truth is, most experiences in life are recurring themes, and many experiences are in fact open to people regardless of their age.

I am no longer bitter or sad about my 'missed out years' in any way.

November 2014

Marriage Equality Heads to SCOTUS

It's official: The Supreme Court of the United States (SCOTUS) has agreed to hear several marriage equality cases. So one of the biggest moments of the global fight for marriage equality may finally be happening next June!

Some background here: litigation as to whether the US constitution should guarantee equal access to marriage has been going on for over a year in several states now. This is different from the kind of litigation that brought equality to states like Massachusetts in earlier stages. While those have focussed on state law, and have been prevented in the majority of states by referenda amending the state constitutions, the recent wave is all about seeking to apply the US constitution to justify an obligation on all 50 states to have marriage equality. If

SCOTUS declares in favour of this proposition, all 50 states will have marriage equality, and all state-level bans on marriage equality will be invalidated. Marriage equality will therefore arrive in states where it will otherwise not arrive for at least a generation, because the numbers to run a new referendum to overturn an existing ban will not be there for at least two decades. Just two years ago the idea that marriage equality in the US could be resolved once and for all during the Obama administration would have been mad fantasy, even just a year ago it would have been a radical proposition, but right now it is a very real possibility.

Some further details: The current wave of litigation originated in lower level courts in 2013 in multiple states, encouraged by the SCOTUS ruling in June 2013 striking down sections of the federal Defence of Marriage Act (DOMA), and allowing the federal government

to finally recognise same-sex marriages performed in states that allow them. Since then, most judges have found in favour of marriage equality, but some have not. Either way, cases are then appealed to a higher court by the losing side, eventually reaching SCOTUS. Already, two months ago, SCOTUS effectively legalised marriage equality in 12 states, by refusing applications for further appeal and upholding a lower court's pro-equality ruling. However, this time they were presented with an anti-equality ruling. As they have been presented with a conflict in the lower courts' rulings, SCOTUS has been left with little choice but to decide the law once and for all. Many analysts are predicting a pro-equality outcome, encouraged by the fact that SCOTUS has already allowed pro-equality rulings to stand.

So what's the implication for Australia? We don't have a constitutional Bill of Rights, so this avenue is not open to us. But a pro-equality

ruling from SCOTUS will definitely help
marriage equality regain momentum here too.
So next year is set to be exciting.

Chapter 10: 2015 Entries

January 2015

Becoming a Feminist

Maria had a talk with me about feminism last week. She has become a dedicated feminist, and she asked me if I identify as a feminist too. I told her I would get back to her later.

All those years ago I decided to reject feminism because it rejected me. I remember writing a diary entry about this in 2007. Essentially, feminism was a club where a large number of its members rejected transwomen back then.

But things may have changed. At least among feminists of our generation, acceptance of transwomen has become nearly universal.

Moreover, many young feminists actually fight side-by-side with us on LGBT rights. And young trans-friendly feminists have become increasingly confident about taking on transphobic feminists, even if they are otherwise long-respected figures in the movement. Partly as a result of these changes, more and more women's colleges in the US are opening their doors to transwomen for the first time.

Transwomen who want to identify as feminists today don't have to fight for their right to do so like a decade ago. They are welcomed into the feminist fold readily by the increasing majority of trans-friendly feminists.

Feminism is changing. And it's not just in relation to trans women. Marriage equality is another area where feminism is evolving. While many old school feminists like Julia Gillard

oppose marriage equality, the new generation of feminists not only support marriage equality, they demand that everyone else support it too. It is still true that some feminists, both young and old, remain sceptical of marriage. But for younger feminists, even if they don't want marriage themselves, they tend to see marriage equality as an equal rights issue rather than an endorsement of marriage itself.

Moreover, it has become 'fashionable' to identify as a feminist again, probably for the first time since the 1970s. Celebrities and popstars are increasingly identifying as feminists, and their popularity have generally increased if they do so. In contrast to a decade ago, nobody questions if feminism is still relevant nowadays.

All this just shows that feminism, like everything else, is not fixed through time. So

should I reassess my approach to feminism? I think it's time I did so.

At the core of it, feminism is just about gender equality. I guess I can call myself a feminist if this is what I believe in. It's OK that I don't agree with many feminists over many issues. Many young feminists disagree with Germaine Greer over trans issues and disagree with Julia Gillard over marriage equality too. It doesn't mean they can't be part of the movement. Feminism is not a political party with a black-and-white platform, after all.

February 2015

Fashion of the Day

Today I spent a day hanging out with Maria and her trans friends, and they talked about how trans issues are becoming like the 'fashion of the day' and how this is making many trans people uncomfortable. They think the recent attention on the coming out of former sports star and reality TV personality Caitlyn Jenner has been especially unhelpful.

I know from personal experience that the vast majority of trans people would prefer less attention. The less attention society pays us the better, because we would blend in easier this way. This is especially important for those undergoing transition right now, in that 'awkward' phase. I can imagine my own

transition would be more difficult in some ways if we received the same level of attention back then. Furthermore, it really feels uncomfortable to be the 'hot topic of discussion' of society at large, to know that everyone around you may be sharing their opinions on the very fact of who you are. Even though I am now long-term transitioned, I am feeling some of this discomfort too, to be honest.

But I would disagree that this is a curse. Rather, it is both a cloud with a silver lining, and an important phase we must pass through, if only for the benefit of future generations.

During my transition, I remember thinking that I just had to put up with the 'limitations' of society that made transition uncomfortable, because you can't expect everyone to understand and accommodate for such a small minority of people. I saw how the gay

community, for example, gradually got society to understand them and support their equality, thinking how it could never happen to us, and how our 'best option' was just to quietly lobby sympathetic politicians to get anti-discrimination laws for us. This approach did end up working in Australia and other places, but while it secured our basic rights to employment and housing, it did not increase societal acceptance at large. Furthermore, there was no guarantee that future transphobic governments may repeal these rights altogether, since there was no public opinion to prevent this from happening.

But now, unexpectedly, we actually have an opportunity to make things much better for the future, for every trans person. This is because once the public understands who we are, I believe they are likely to be sympathetic to our needs and rights. As the gay rights movement has shown, the majority of people are not

actually keen on being bigots, they just have misunderstandings that need to be resolved. And once the public is on side, life will be easier in everything from coming out to employment and housing, to obtaining medical services. Furthermore, securing long-lasting legislative change with clear public support, similar to the gradual increase in gay rights over past decades, is now something we can hope to achieve.

I'm not saying that there won't be some short term pain. But I believe that, for the long term gain, it is worth it to go through this phase.

April 2015

Pronoun Rounds

Today I attended one of the LGBT support meetings Maria regularly goes to, because I was invited to talk to several trans people there about what life feels like in the long term after transitioning.

You know, before this invitation, I had never even thought about 'how life is like now that I'm long-term post-transition'. It's not something you naturally think about. Life just goes on, and whatever new features of life that came about as a result of transition gradually becomes the 'new normal'. Furthermore, while I don't feel 'gender dysphoria' anymore, my life is still quite similar to the way it was before transition, except for gender-specific features. So there really isn't much to talk or think about. But then, I realised that this is exactly what

some people in transition need to hear from people like me: they want to know that there is a future after transition, that life can feel 'normal' and just right.

Attending the meeting itself was quite an experience for me, something unexpected. While this was a regular support meeting for LGBT young adults in the area, trans people did make up nearly a fifth of those in attendance. This stands in contrast to my experience with the so-called LGBT support groups and services that I came into contact with during transition. Back then, they had generally not even seen a trans person, and I became fed up with having to explain myself eventually. Statistically, this change would also likely mean that many more trans people have come out in the past decade. I calculated that if the proportion of gay people vs trans people in this sample is reflective of the wider reality, then trans people would actually have a frequency of about 1 in 500, many times

more than previous reports. In fact, I wonder if there are actually many more trans people than we believed there were all along, with many just hiding in fear or unaware of their true identity all along.

Another interesting feature of the meeting was that it started with a 'name and pronoun round', where everyone introduced themselves providing their name and pronoun. It was the first time I had seen something like this. So here was a solution that can solve all the pronoun problems trans people have ever encountered! I'm still unsure if this is going to be realistic to apply in the wider world where the vast majority of people aren't trans. But then, I was told by someone there that this practice is actually also being introduced in some college-level debating tournaments. Apparently, another reason was that some people wished to be referred to as 'they' rather than a gender-specific pronoun.

June 2015

Two Victories

The US Supreme Court has declared that marriage equality must be granted in all fifty states as per the US constitution, in a 5-4 decision. Thus marriage equality arrives in another country, increasing the total to about 20 now. This victory also arrives a month after Ireland voted by referendum to support marriage equality, with the Yes side winning about 62% of the vote.

Both victories have of course been welcomed by LGBT advocates and supporters. 'Love wins' has become perhaps the most popular phrase to sum it all up. However, the wider reception appears to be quite different. While the Irish vote has become even begrudgingly accepted by even opponents, the Supreme Court ruling has attracted criticism of being 'undemocratic'

by opponents. The different reception is felt even here in Australia: while the Irish result created goodwill from all sides to move the issue forward, the US ruling has attracted scorn even from conservatives here, and I'm worried if the goodwill gained last month may have been diminished as a result.

All this is not surprising. Nobody likes to be told that they are wrong by five elites (even if they are actually wrong), and everybody generally accepts a majority verdict in a democracy. As I understand it, there have been concerns about potential backlash lasting for many years in the US in the event of a pro-equality ruling, even before the ruling was actually handed down. Now it appears that the backlash is just starting. But does this mean the US ruling was anything less than legitimate? I don't think so. If the US constitution guarantees its citizens equality, then marriage equality in all states is a logical conclusion, even if some may not like that.

Some have commented wondering if the US could have gone about it 'more democratically'. But that realistically would have meant a major delay in equality in many, perhaps the majority of states. In the US, marriage is usually decided state-by-state, and many states have a Bush-era constitutional ban on marriage equality, meaning only a referendum can bring about equality. In many states, the numbers to win in a referendum won't be there for many years realistically. If not for the Supreme Court intervention, nationwide marriage equality would likely have been a whole generation away. Many couples who wanted to marry would die waiting. You can't call this fair, I believe.

July 2015

An Issue of Conscience

The Australian Labor Party is soon going to discuss at its national conference as to whether the party will continue to allow a 'conscience vote' on marriage equality. Currently, although the party platform clearly states its support for marriage equality, individual MPs and senators are given a 'conscience vote' on the matter, meaning that they remain free to vote against equality. If the conscience vote is cancelled, all Labor members must vote for equality in parliament, or face expulsion. Labor leader Bill Shorten supports the continuation of conscience vote, but his position is not guaranteed to be carried at the conference.

The move to 'bind' all MPs to vote for equality is controversial for two reasons. Firstly, it's tactically dangerous. The conservative

government is soon to decide whether it too will allow a 'conscience vote', without which it would be very difficult to legislate for equality in parliament. A 'bound' vote in Labor would provide ample argument for the conservatives not to allow their own a conscience vote. Secondly, some supporters of a bound vote have reportedly said that marriage equality is not a matter of conscience but a matter of human rights. This has offended quite a lot of people, as expected.

On the other hand, supporters of the bound vote believe that it will ensure Labor can legislate for equality if it wins the next election, even without the conservatives having a conscience vote. They also believe that Labor should morally require its members to support equality.

Tactically, I don't know which is the better way. As it all depends on future events that haven't happened yet (like the next election), nobody can say for sure either. But I have observed that internationally marriage equality is generally legislated via conscience votes. On the other hand, I do believe that marriage equality should be a matter of conscience, because like all cultural matters, people should be free to maintain the beliefs of their upbringing, whether we like it or not. Telling people they cannot consciously hold the traditional position is counterproductive and can create resentment, I believe. This being said, however, still does not completely exclude support for a bound vote, because the Labor party does not guarantee a conscience vote for all matters of conscience: such votes are guaranteed only for life and death matters like abortion and euthanasia. Complicated, right?

Update: The Labor party actually decided to adopt a bound vote two terms from now, i.e. likely starting in 2019.

August 2015

A Divided Party

The conservative government has decided that, instead of granting its members a conscience vote to resolve the marriage debate either way, they will hold a plebiscite on the issue after the election next year. A plebiscite is, in Australian law, a referendum that does not change the constitution, but rather held to gauge public opinion to guide parliament to amend laws if necessary. The conservatives apparently held a marathon meeting to make this decision, and Prime Minister Tony Abbott fronted the media to announce this policy at about nine in the evening (from my memory).

As expected, Labor's eventual adoption of a bound vote has provided conservatives with a justification not to move to a conscience vote. But another factor in the plebiscite decision

appears to be the divided state of the conservatives on this matter. There are now both staunch supporters and (even more) staunch opponents in their party room now. They probably hope that the plebiscite will mean that they don't have to fight themselves on the matter.

October 2015

More on Social Justice Warriors

I don't agree with the agenda of the social justice warriors (SJWs). Previously in this diary, I gave my reasons for this decision. It's not that I don't agree with the idea of social justice or the need to address bigotry. It's just that I believe in using more 'liberal' and 'rational' methods.

Recently, an SJW asked me what I think of the anti-SJW movement, and how I can in my good conscience let these people use their 'freedom of speech' to encourage hate and bigotry. I have indeed come across some of the things people have said in the name of 'protecting freedom of speech' against SJWs. And trust me, there's plenty of racist, sexist, homophobic and transphobic things they have said, some of which are quite hurtful to me personally as a trans person.

I do not support the self-proclaimed anti-SJW movement. But then I do support freedom of speech, and the existence of this noisy minority is not going to change my mind. My belief is that whenever people 'use' their freedom of speech to spread false or hateful statements, it is our responsibility to stand up for truth and equality, using our own freedom of speech. For example, while it hurts me to hear someone say that 'trans women are not real women', I am strong and rational enough to argue confidently as to why they are wrong. I believe that while these arguments may be painful, they are something we need to have, in order to progress society. While I cannot in good conscience support the SJW movement in its current form, I will wholeheartedly support an alternative movement that seeks to address misunderstandings and spread the message of equality and acceptance using our freedom of speech.

Sometimes I wonder if SJWs act the way they do because they don't have faith in the liberal and rational approach to progress society. They see that there is still plenty of bigotry around, and think that the only way to truly change things is via more radical action. But from my own personal experience, change comes in steps, and things are already getting better all the time, proving that the liberal and rational approach actually works. Today's discussion about trans rights draws from discussions about gay rights and women's rights society has already had, which in turn have drawn on the idea that everyone should be equal, something once considered radical but is generally accepted today. Today's marriage equality movement builds on the gradual increase in gay rights, including importantly the civil union and de-facto rights type reforms gained in the previous decade, and the increasing consensus that LGBT relationships are part of the fabric of

families that form society. At each step along the way, we need to secure the changes we can, and continue to push society along through ongoing liberal and rational discussion. Radical action undermines our ability to do these things, therefore I believe it is ultimately unhelpful.

Chapter 11: 2016 Entries

January 2016

What If Stealth Disappeared?

Traditionally, many trans people chose to live in stealth mode - that is, post transition, they don't let people know they are trans at all. Stealth comes in many 'levels'. On a most 'shallow' level, you could even say I live in stealth mode 90% of the time, simply because I don't tell people that I'm trans generally, even though I have never attempted to actively deny it either. Most definitions of stealth however describe an existence where one actively prevents others from knowing their trans history, for example by fabricating a gender appropriate cis (i.e. non-trans) past. On the deepest level there is 'deep stealth', where possibly even one's partner does not know.

By definition, nobody knows how many people choose to live in stealth.

But recently, some trans people are wondering where the opportunity to live in stealth is disappearing. Firstly, everything has become computerised and records are easily traced. The popularity of social media also means that one's past cannot be easily completely hidden. Secondly, trans awareness has increased greatly in the general population in just the past few years, and it is becoming increasingly difficult to 'pass' 100% of the time. Recently, there have even been quite a few stories of genetic women being misidentified as trans! Remember, just one or two failures to pass can make stealth mode unravel completely.

I agree that the opportunity to live in stealth is fast fading away. But I don't think it's something we need to regret. Many trans

people only 'chose' to live in stealth in the past due to the kind of discrimination they would face otherwise. In a society increasingly accepting of trans people, why would we want to live in stealth? I mean, it involves being 'fake', like being in a new closet, and makes one's life very paranoid in general. In an era where the vast majority of gay and lesbian people come out and live authentically, wouldn't living in stealth be contrary to this spirit of authenticity and acceptance for all?

I think stealth isn't something we should cherish or celebrate at all. It was just a necessity of life for many trans people historically. With the evolution of society towards accepting trans people wholeheartedly, one day, hopefully soon, nobody will feel the need to live in stealth.

February 2016

My Feminism Anniversary

A week ago was my one year anniversary of deciding to embrace feminism. Here are some reflections.

What finally made me able to embrace feminism was the more inclusive form of feminism that I encountered from some in recent years. For too long, I had felt that feminism was somehow exclusive of people like me on many levels, and even with the more trans-friendly style in recent years, I had felt that to be a feminist would be like joining a political party, and having to toe the party line. This really wasn't something I can take. While I was happy that the trans-friendly feminists appeared to have generally won the debate within feminism by early this decade, the whole thing still seemed too much like individuals

trying to bring a reluctant political party along to embrace change, like more enlightened members trying to bring a conservative party to reluctantly accept marriage equality. This, for me, reinforced the view that joining feminism is like joining a political party even more than anything else.

But more recently, I realised that real feminism isn't that 'political party'. While some feminists have unfortunately overly politicised the whole idea and have also policed acceptable stances to take, this really shouldn't be how the concept of feminism operates. And while I am totally put off by this reality, it shouldn't be a barrier for me to embrace what feminism really is: that is, a movement where women and gender minority voices can get heard, and society can be changed to make things more equal. I have become a feminist, but I will never join that 'political party' and toe that party line, because to me, that would be betraying the

real idea of feminism. I hope that more feminists can reflect on this idea, too.

The other thing that used to irritate me about feminism was the elitist attitude, or the 'mother knows best' attitude among many old-school feminists. It's like how they cannot just decide not to marry themselves, they have to effectively join forces with the religious right to prevent LGBT couples from marrying too. It's also like how they used to decide that trans people don't exist, until it became too hard to deny. As somebody who is committed to freedom, whose such commitment comes from a lifetime of being hurt by rules, red-tape and hierarchies who enforce these things, down to even such mundane detail as school uniforms, I just could not bring myself to support any movement in which an elite gets to decide for everyone else and impose rules others have to follow. The 'mother knows best' of some feminists is really no better than the 'father

knows best' of patriarchy. But again, this is not real feminism, just another sad reality we need to overcome.

Real, liberal, feminism should be about listening to the real voices, needs and wishes of women and LGBTs, and find solutions to move forward that enhance liberty and equality, and are inclusive of all. If feminism is serious about looking after minorities' equal rights, then we need to be inclusive, listen to and be empathetic with even the most minority concerns. We need to have conversations about issues all the time. We need to engage everyone, and not have any taboos at all. Above all, we need to maintain an open mind to truly listen.

March 2016

Maria Completes Transition

A few weeks ago Maria told me she felt that her transition was generally done, and today I treated her to a lunch to celebrate this milestone in her life.

We discussed how her experience of transition was. While gender transition is often an emotional rollercoaster and Maria's was no exception, she thought that the experience was mostly positive.

A major difference between my transition and Maria's was that she never felt any of the isolation and 'surreal' feelings that I had. I guess it really helps that nowadays everyone understands what trans is, and many people (and most of our generation) are accepting.

Being trans is increasingly becoming a normal part of everyday life, and not a weird or surreal experience a small minority has to go through alone. You know that's true when newspapers and entertainment magazines discuss trans issues respectfully and not infrequently. Trans people also don't feel like they have to explain themselves as much nowadays. When Maria went through her document changes, she didn't worry about whether the staff would be surprised or give her trouble. Trans people changing their documents are a relatively common thing nowadays, and department websites even have clear instructions about it most of the time.

Transition is still not easy. But it's usually less difficult than just a decade ago.

Going forward, I can see a time where social acceptance and understanding means that

transition is not much of a hassle anymore. Like how coming out as gay is already not much of a big deal in some especially enlightened sections of society. I know it's going to take some time, but I am hopeful.

June 2016

Erasing Gender Boundaries

A high school here in Sydney has become the first to announce a new uniform policy where there are no gender boundaries, i.e. where all students can choose the pants uniform or the skirt uniform. This has predictably caused some controversy and outrage from conservative sections of society. But I do welcome this development. After all, it would have been what I wanted when I was in high school. Even if it's far too late for me to have this opportunity, I am happy for other trans people to have it.

I believe in erasing unnecessary gender boundaries. This doesn't mean people won't be able to continue to identify as male or female clearly and exclusively. It just means that we don't have to create rigid rules around it as a

society. Some people are fearful of this kind of change, but what's there to fear about, really? It's almost as irrational as a fear of same-sex marriages, which was quite common just a decade ago.

Just like marriage equality, erasing unnecessarily rigid gender boundaries won't mean any trouble to anybody, but would mean a world of difference to a few. It would make trans people's lives so much easier.

July 2016

Front Page for Marriage Equality

Today (July 2) is election day in Australia, and the newspapers have come out with a final round of polls and endorsements. While the polls for the election itself remains in dead heat territory, one newspaper had conducted a poll regarding marriage equality along with their final election polls, and found that 70% of respondents were in support. Consequently, the newspaper has said, on its front page no less, that whoever wins government, this is the one thing we surely want from both of them.

In this election, all three major party leaders are supporters of marriage equality, for the first time ever. There are differences in their approach to the issue, regarding whether it should be put to a plebiscite (public vote, like a referendum) or just a vote in parliament, and

this may spell some short term trouble in the next year or so. But all three leaders are committed supporters, still. Therefore, I remain optimistic that we will get there soon enough.

But the most striking thing is that, marriage equality has gone from the issue that progressive politicians avoid and conservative politicians use to wedge them just a decade ago, to an cause with widespread mainstream support, even deserving of a front page newspaper endorsement on election day. It is due to supporters making their case again and again, changing minds everywhere they go, that we have come to this point. It just shows that, if you open up a conversation and put up a persuasive case, while respectfully addressing the concerns sceptics have too, you can change a lot in even just a decade. The marriage equality movement is indeed a model other social movements should learn from.

[EDITORIAL NOTE: this diary unfortunately came to an end before marriage equality is achieved in Australia. I will attempt to publish a second edition later, to finish telling the story on marriage equality in Australia.]

August 2016

No Labels

Recently, at least two female celebrities who are dating other women have refused to put a label on their relationship or their sexuality. This has started a discussion in the wider community: is it necessary to have labels? After all, people who are heterosexual don't have to emphasize that they are 'straight', and don't have to particularly label their relationship as a 'straight relationship'.

I agree. While I think that labels need not be abandoned because they are useful descriptors, it is actually unfair to expect gay couples to wear the 'gay' label if we don't expect heterosexual couples to wear the 'straight' label.

Furthermore, I think it may apply to trans people too. Not every trans person wants to wear the 'trans' label. Some do so proudly, but not everyone. So if a trans person wants to be 'just a boy', 'just a girl', or even 'just a person', I think everyone should respect it.

September 2016

LGBT Identity and Political Affiliation

The results of the Australian election are that the conservative government, headed by moderate (i.e. not conservative) Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull has been narrowly returned. This time there are also six LGBT members of parliament, more than ever before. I think that's worth celebrating in and of itself. However, not all LGBT advocates are celebrating, because four of the six are on the conservative side of politics.

This reminds me of the attitude some activists have towards Caitlyn Jenner, who supports the Republican Party. When some leftist LGBTs learned of her political orientation and beliefs, they almost immediately withdrew their initial supportive stance towards her. I think it's sad.

Some left-wing LGBT activists have a habit of hating on LGBTs who don't side with the left politically. Their attitude is that LGBTs who support the right are 'traitors' to our community. While it is true that the left has provided us with more legal rights and respect than the right historically, this attitude is something I find really problematic.

LGBTs are people too, and I think we can all agree that everyone deserves equal rights and opportunities in life, in every area. If LGBTs are only allowed to support or join particular political parties, how can you call that equality? The LGBT movement also prides itself on encouraging people to be authentic. Wouldn't you think that, statistically, there would have to be a substantial number of LGBTs whose authentic political orientation is on the right side of the spectrum?

Furthermore, strategically it would also make sense to have right-wing LGBTs in politics, so that we can engage with both sides of politics. As the marriage equality battles have shown, we need plenty of support from both sides of politics if we are to win reforms. While it is expected that more of the support would come from the left side of politics, we still need plenty of right-wing support.

Finally, let me say this to the aforementioned leftist activists: if you moved to a parallel universe where it is the right wing who are the primary champions of LGBT rights, will you be able to just change all your political beliefs and allegiances to fit this reality? And if you decide to still stay with the left and work for change from within, how will you feel if others label you as a 'traitor'?

p.s. a similar phenomenon can also be observed in feminism, unfortunately. According to some feminists, you can't be a good feminist if you are politically right-wing, opposed to affirmative action, pro-life (even if it's just a personally held religious belief), or, in some ridiculous cases, even if you don't believe in man-made climate change. While we are personally free to agree or disagree with any of the aforementioned stances (I certainly disagree with some of them myself), they should not be grounds to be shut out of the feminist movement. Every criticism of the narrowness of some in the LGBT rights movement in this entry can also apply to some feminists, unfortunately, and this needs to change. Both LGBT rights and feminism can only become stronger when the tent is big enough to include everyone who is pro-queer and pro-women, and is also big enough to include all sorts of ideas and ideals.

Also from TaraElla...

The Princess's Spirit Trilogy #1-3:

An Early 21st Century Liberty Movement Story

The early 21st century is a time of unprecedented opportunity for those coming of age. It is a time when many young adults set out to achieve their dreams, be it starting their own business, starting a political movement, or propelling themselves to superstardom.

Angelle's dream is to become Cultural Royalty of Pacificland, thus achieving what her mother couldn't. Her vision is based on freedom, dreams, love and fairness for all.

However, she soon finds that whilst change appears to be in the air, the resistance is often even greater. While the early 21st century is a time of opportunity for some, many people remain left behind, and tension and

dissatisfaction is the order of the day in many areas of life. The increasing pitch of the culture wars, and the influence of global movements from the Tea Party to the Occupy Protests, also combine to make Pacificland a daily ideological warzone. Meanwhile, Pacificland gets caught up in a meaningless political stalemate, with reforms like marriage equality stalled seemingly forever.

With her own dreams on the line, will Angelle stay true to her values? And if she does, will it be enough to make a positive difference? Life isn't meant to be easy, but are there rewards for the brave at the end?

Also from TaraElla...

The Story of a 21st Century 'Somebody': Independent Culture Creation in the 2000s & 2010s

For most of humanity, most people were destined to live and die anonymously. To be 'somebody' in this world, a somebody whose opinions would be heard in any way beyond close friends, was a privilege very few had enjoyed. In this environment, there would eventually be no point for most people to continue to think of themselves as a 'unique individual'. It surely looks amazing in hindsight, how far we have come in less than two decades.

This book is primarily about my journey to become a 'somebody' with something to say. Topics covered include how technology has enabled people like myself to have a voice,

what it feels like to join the cultural conversation and take cultural stances, and participating in politics and the ‘culture wars’ through citizen journalism. I will also examine the bigger cultural impacts of this democratization of culture creation.

Throughout this book, I will be telling my own story so far, as a cultural voice in this rapidly changing world. But I will also be illustrating the wider story of how profoundly the world changed, in these first two decades of the 21st century. The technology changed first, and that was groundbreaking enough, but I think that the greatest change was in the culture.